

# Search for Meaning

## Spring, 2001

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### Course Objectives

The course will be devoted to a series of sustained reflections on three figures—Socrates, Francis of Assisi, and Laozi—each of whom has been a source of inspiration for enormous numbers of people in their attempts to make sense of life and the world about us. The aim: to use these reflections to crystallize a set of problems concerning history and tradition. So far as skills are concerned, the course is designed to help you to sharpen your abilities to read carefully, write reflectively, and analyze and construct arguments—abilities that are essential for thinking clearly about historical and philosophical questions (and, for that matter, anything else). In addition, the course will help you deepen your sense of the intellectual, cultural, and historical presuppositions of the disciplines of philosophy and history, will familiarize you with some of the most impressive aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual achievements in the history of the world, and will provide you with some understanding of at least some of the effects that the study of philosophy and the study of history can have on our lives.

### Texts

The texts for the course are contained in the following books, which will be available at The Book Stop, the book store located at 931 16th St.

Aristophanes. *Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, The Frogs, The Birds, Lysistrata*. Trans. William Arrowsmith *et al.* New York: New American Library, 1984. (ISBN: 0452007178)

Bonaventure. *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journal into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*. Ewert Cousins, trans. New York: Paulist Press, 1978. (ISBN: 0809121212)

Chesterton, G. K. *St. Francis of Assisi*. New York: Image Books, 1987. (ISBN: 0385029004)

Zhuangzi. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*. Trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia U.P., 1996. (ISBN: 0231105959)

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 5th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999. [Recommended] (ISBN: 0873529758)

Laozi. *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Harper, 1992. (ISBN: 0060955430)

Plato. *Great Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. New York: Signet, 1999. (ISBN: 0451527453)

Reps, Paul, and Nyogen Senzaki, compilers. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. New York: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1998. (ISBN: 0804831866)

Ugolino. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. Trans. Raphael Brown. New York: Image Books, 1971. (ISBN: 0385075448)

Xenophon. *Conversations of Socrates*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield. New York: Penguin, 1990. (ISBN: 014044517X)

While there are many translations of the non-English works we'll be reading this semester, I advise you strongly to use the ones contained in the editions listed above. Differences among translations can be substantial, and they can be very confusing; similarly, differences in pagination in different editions can complicate the business of discussing the texts.

Translations of most of these texts are also available as e-texts, and these can save you money, but at the cost of at least some of the difficulties mentioned above. You'll find a list of such e-texts on the class web site, at <http://www.unco.edu/philosophy/current/290-009.html>.

### Course Requirements and Grades

#### *E-Mail Account:*

You're required to have an e-mail account. If you don't have one already, you'll need to arrange to get one by Friday. You can get a UNC account in any of the computer labs on campus or at Bear Logic, the computer store in the University Center. Accounts with other national or local ISPs (AOL, CompuServ, Juno, Hotmail, CTOS, etc.) are perfectly acceptable as well.

#### *Reading Assignments:*

You'll find a general schedule for the reading assignments in the course outline at the end of the syllabus. More specific assignments will be announced in class and posted on the class web site as well. Make sure that you have these done on time. Expect to spend time on the readings. They're difficult, challenging, serious texts that require prolonged study and reflection, not presentations of predigested material written for people in a hurry.

#### *Quizzes:*

Brief, unannounced quizzes will be given on the assigned readings from time to time. Under no circumstances may missed quizzes be made up. Your average on these quizzes will be worth 10% of your final grade.

#### *Newsgroup Submissions:*

You're required to make regular contributions to the class newsgroup—the chief forum outside class for class discussion. You're to make at least one carefully and thoughtfully written contribution each week of at least 15 lines—not counting quotations. More information about what you should be doing in your newsgroup submissions will be available soon. You can link to the newsgroup from our class web site if you have a news-capable web browser. If not, you'll need a dedicated newsreader instead. For people using Windows, Forte's *Free Agent* comes highly recommended; for those using the Mac OS, I recommend *MT-NewsWatcher*. Both programs are free, and links to sites from which they can be downloaded are available on the class web site. The quantity and quality of your contributions to the newsgroup will be worth 25% of your final grade.

#### *Essays:*

You'll be required to write three short essays, due on the seventh, eleventh, and fifteenth Fridays of the semester (i.e., March 2, April 6, and May 4). You'll get fuller descriptions of just what I'll be looking for in each of these essays well in advance of the dates on which they'll be due.

The manual of style I expect you to use for the essays is Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th Edition [New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999]. Copies are available at the Book Stop. The quality of your work on the essays will determine 45% of your final grade.

#### *Class Participation:*

Finally, you'll be graded on the extent and seriousness of your participation in class discussion. The grade you receive here will be worth 10% of your final grade. Extensive absence from class will seriously affect your grade in this area.

*Final Examination:*

There will be a two and a half hour final from 10:45-1:15 on Tuesday, May 8. Your performance on the final will be worth 10% of your final grade.

*General Rules Regarding Submission of Work:*

To receive credit for the course, you must write all three essays and take the final examination. Zeros will be recorded for missed quizzes and missing newsgroup submissions.

*Overall Determination of Grades:*

Summing up, your overall grade will be determined as follows: quizzes, 10%; newsgroup submissions, 25%; essays, 15% each; class participation, 10%; final exam: 10%.

*Penalty for Cheating or Plagiarism:*

The penalty for cheating on the quizzes or for plagiarism (i.e., for copying either the ideas or the words of another without appropriate attribution) in your newsgroup submissions, your essays, or your final exam will be denial of credit for the entire course.

### Course Outline

Week 1	(1/17-1/19): Preliminaries	
Week 2	(1/22-1/26): Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i> and Plato's <i>Apology</i>	
Week 3	(1/29-2/2 <sup>1</sup> ): Plato's <i>Meno</i> and <i>Symposium</i>	
Week 4	(2/5-2/9): Xenophon's <i>Apology</i> and <i>Symposium</i>	
Week 5	(2/12-2/16): Xenophon's <i>Memorabilia</i>	
Week 6	(2/19-2/23): Bonaventure's <i>Life of St. Francis</i>	
Week 7	(2/26-3/2): Ugolino's <i>Little Flowers</i>	<i>First Paper Due: 3/2</i>
Week 8	(3/5-3/9): Ugolino's <i>Little Flowers</i>	
Week 9	(3/12-3/16 <sup>2</sup> ): Chesterton's <i>St. Francis of Assisi</i>	
— Spring Break (Mar. 19-23) —		
Week 10	(3/26-3/30): <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	
Week 11	(4/2-4/6): <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	<i>Second Paper Due: 4/6</i>
Week 12	(4/9-4/13): Zhuangzi— <i>Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings</i>	
Week 13	(4/16-4/20): Selections from <i>Zen Flesh, Zen Bones</i>	
Week 14	(4/23-4/27): History and Tradition	
Week 15	(4/30-5/4): History, Tradition, and the Search for Meaning	<i>Third Paper Due: 5/4</i>
Final Exam:	10:45-1:15 on Tuesday, May 8	

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<sup>1</sup>Add/drop deadline: January 29

<sup>2</sup>Withdrawal deadline: March 12 (noon)